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March 1956

RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

RECORDS CONTROL SCHEDULE

FOR THE

OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD

Superseded by
DDP/EB Rm.
Schedule
July 1960

KD

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9 Mar 1956

12 Mar 1956

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White House Co-ordination Plan Envisions a Team of 'Hopkinses'

By CHARLES BARTLETT
Contributing Writer

The big job of a President is to make his decisions stick within his own Government and an executive order is in the works which may create a veritable team of Harry Hopkinses.

The Federal reflex system will be strikingly changed soon when President Kennedy signs an order to abolish the Operations Co-ordinating Board, a quiet mechanism created by Eisenhower lieutenants to co-ordinate the impact of Presidential decisions in the cold war field, to press for their execution, and to dredge lurking issues up for presidential judgments.

Mr. Kennedy has already alluded to the difficulty that a chief executive finds in getting a clear response to his decisions.

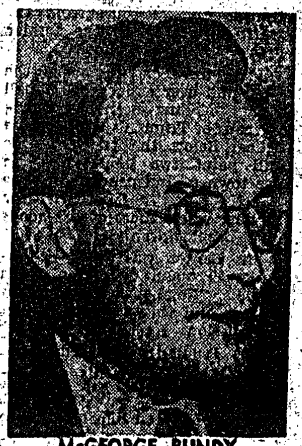
A student of the system under Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jonathan Daniels, wrote that half of a President's suggestions can be safely forgotten by a cabinet officer. If he asks a second time about his suggestions, he can be safely told it is being investigated. "And if he asks a third time," Mr. Daniels observed, "a wise cabinet officer will give him at least part of what he suggests. But only occasionally, except about the most important matters, do President's ever get around to asking three times."

Robert Lovett, who served under two presidents, once observed that policy-making is like love-making among elephants. This is true, he said, because there is lots of trumpeting, everything of significance transpires at a high level, and nothing comes of it for three years.

The Different Concept

Mr. Kennedy's plan is a barometer of a significant difference between him an dhis predecessor. The Eisenhower concept was that the bulging Federal government could only be held in shape with a tight and precise organization at the top. Mr. Kennedy's emerging philosophy is that the sagging structure responds less to organization than to highly personalized leadership.

He is moving, therefore, to substitute a team of Phi Beta Kappa'd Harry Hopkinses, the cream of his academic harvest, for the OCB machinery. The body's inter-departmental committees, embracing all the Cold War agencies, will give way to a handful of bright and probing men. They will work out of the Executive Office Building with the privilege of ready access to the President and the responsibility of absorption in the big foreign issues that are on his blotter.



McGEORGE BUNDY
Co-ordination prober.

WALT W. ROSTOW
Already on duty.

Assigned to specific trouble spots, these new lieutenants are to burrow and bully their way to the hearts of the departments, unearth the problems that may lay hidden, negotiate the gaps between agencies, and attain co-ordination by putting major decisions before their boss. The lesser co-ordination problems are being passed back to the country desk officers in the State Department.

Two Already on Duty

Two of the team, McGeorge Bundy of Harvard and Walt W. Rostow of M. I. T., are already on hand and churning. The remaining posts will be filled with slow selectiveness, drawing further on the pool of university expertese. The success of the system will rest heavily upon the ability of these men to emulate Hopkins in a judicious use of their presidential backing and to stir respect for their statesmanship. If they prove academic or fuzzy, it is the general expectation that they will be ground in the wheels of the bureaucracy. The test is a tough one, even for gifted men.

Their hazards are sharpened by the fact they will be walking constantly on ground deeded by tradition to the State Department. The full exercise of their duties, particularly fulfillment of the President's wish to know all the alternatives in every major situation, will entail many occasions of trespass.

The OCB was baptized in the blood of men like Nelson Rockefeller and William H. Jackson whose Federal careers were extinguished in the courses of trespasses on John Foster Dulles preserves. The space between a President and his Secretary of State is volatile and Hopkins' wide license was possible because Roosevelt had virtually turned his back on Cordell Hull.

The Republicans who participated in the executive reflex system under Eisenhower, most of whom also wear Phi Beta Kappa keys, reflect strong misgivings over the dismemberment of the OCB. It had weaknesses, they admit, but it was at least an apparatus in being and tailored to survive in the high pressured atmosphere. All of their experts on executive organization, from Eisenhower down, are convinced that it is essential to retain the function of the OCB. Observing, as Mr. Jackson has, "that brilliant individualists make bad organizations," the veteran Republicans maintain that it takes extensive and perservering organizations to assert the President's will against the experienced stubbornness of the departments.

Bureaucracy Feared

The newcomers' view is that the apparatus had grown to the dimensions and weight of a bureaucracy. There was the board itself with eight members, either the chiefs or second men in their agencies involved; the "junior OCB" with full-time assistants from each of the agencies; a staff headed by the OCB executive officer; and some 40 inter-departmental groups working on country position papers and other specialized matters.

Of all this the newcomers plan to keep only the executive staff to monitor the follow-through on presidential decisions. There may also be informal weekly meetings of the officials who would have sat in the previous administration as members of the board.

But formal co-ordinating as such is not popular with the new administration. The workings of the previous operation are criticized for a tendency to produce excessive compromise and take the onus of responsibility off department officials. There is a view that the OCB tended to slow the action of the executive branch. The newcomers hope that by putting greater emphasis on the State Department as a principal co-ordinator while subjecting its policy decisions to closer presidential scrutiny, they can achieve more dynamism.

So they are going to try it their way in the face of the Republican warning that they are pitting amateur judgments against the experience of eight years. "The test of their approach will come after they have made the speeches and had the good ideas," observed one of the retiring experts. "If it is wrong, nothing much will come of the ideas."

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